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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN ENVIRONMENT UPDATE, JUNE 30, 2006

11. Summary: This information is drawn primarily from the Kazakhstani press and has not yet been verified. The opinions expressed in this report, therefore, should not be interpreted as official positions and/or policy of the U.S. Government.

- Avian Flu Priorities Discussed in Almaty
- Ust-Kamenogorsk Ranks First in Oncological Disease
- Lake Alakol Expansion Eroding Shoreline
- Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever Kills Four in SKO
- TCO Fined \$2M for Violation of Environmental Norms
- President Signs Law on Protection of Natural Areas
- Over 1.8 Million Sturgeon Fry Released into the Caspian
- Governor Calls Koshkar-Ata Waste an Imminent Threat
- ECO Environmental Ministers Meet in Almaty

End Summary.

Avian Flu Priorities Discussed in Almaty

12. On June 12-13, Almaty hosted a regional conference on Avian Flu Control and Response. Participants discussed strategies to mitigate the potential impact of avian influenza and human flu pandemics in Central Asia. The participants voiced the need to enhance regional cooperation across the board, and recommended a multi-sector coordination effort to strengthen the capacity of veterinary and human health experts to respond to avian influenza. They noted that from 2003 through 2005, fifteen countries had reported outbreaks of the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus, including China, Russia, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Most countries in the region have stepped up their efforts to contain the spread of the virus, but their detection capabilities remain limited, and are complicated by the fact that the region serves as a crossing point of four major flyways of migratory birds. Diagnostic equipment is also lacking in Central Asia. Only Kazakhstan has a laboratory that can diagnose the human form of the H5N1 virus.

Ust-Kamenogorsk Ranks First in Oncological Disease

13. Ust-Kamenogorsk ranks first among Kazakhstani cities in the number of people suffering from oncological diseases (nearly 6000 cases). Health experts attribute this to the high levels of hazardous emissions in the air around the city. According to an expert from the regional Center for Environmental Monitoring, the amounts of benzopyrene, nitrogen dioxide, and sulphur dioxide exceed safe levels by 2-4 times, 1.5-2 times, and 1-2 times respectively. The region in which Ust-Kamenogorsk is located has consistently

seen the highest national levels of oncological disease for the past 20 years.

Lake Alakol Expansion Eroding Shoreline

14. Lake Alakol's medicinal properties make it a popular tourist destination. However, the lake's continued expansion is eroding away 40-50 meters of shoreline per year. Already, destruction of shoreline property has made investors wary of establishing new or maintaining existing facilities. The government has allocated \$85,000 from the state budget to study this problem.

Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever Kills Four in SKO

15. Two more residents of the Southern Kazakhstan Oblast (SKO) died from Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHV) during the week of June 26. That brings the annual total of SKO residents lost to the disease to four. Thus far in 2006, there have been eight cases of CCHV in SKO, with four of them proving fatal.

TCO Fined \$2M for Violation of Environmental Norms

16. Atyrau's Regional Procurator's Office ruled that

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Tengizchevroil (TCO), a Kazakh-Russian-American partnership, must pay a \$2 million fine for violation of ecological norms. Over the last six months, the Tengiz oil field has had 31 accidents, from which 232 cubic meters of hydrogen sulphide and other poisonous substances were released into the atmosphere. According to Environment Minister Nurlan Iskakov, TCO has no intention of living up to its commitments regarding the injection of sewage water into the wells. For this and other reasons, the Minister believes it is necessary to impose harsher punishments on such violations, and even suggested the government might reconsider the terms of the contract.

President Signs Law on Protection of Natural Areas

17. President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed into law "On Natural Areas of Preferential Protection," along with several related amendments on specially-protected natural reserves and forests. The law stresses the importance of "ecological networks" and "ecological corridors," and establishes performance principles for specially-protected natural reserves and forest, steppe, desert, and underwater ecosystems. The law also introduces a new preservation scheme for natural monuments, wildlife sanctuaries and preserved areas. Furthermore, the law specifies procedures and restrictions regarding industrial development in areas of preferential protection.

Over 1.8 Million Sturgeon Fry Released into the Caspian Sea

18. The Atyrau Sturgeon Fish Breeding Plant (Atyrau Region) released red fish fry into the Caspian Sea: 1.3 million young sturgeons, 505,000 young belugas and 34,000 young starlets. According to Svetlana Surgutskaya, the plant's

production manager, a second release of the fry of valuable fish, including plain and starred sturgeon, is due in early July. "The annual plan for the release of red fish fry amounts to 3.5 million fish," she said. She added that special chips would be installed into the bodies of 10,000 young fish to keep track of their movement and growth.

Governor Calls Koshkar-Ata Waste an Imminent Threat

¶9. The Akim (governor) of the Mangystau Region, Krymbek Kusherbayev, is concerned about mass quantities of radioactive uranium mill tailings stored in Koshkar-Ata, located only 5 km from Aktau. According to experts, the site accumulated over 400 million tons of waste from 1964-1996, 105 million of which are uranium mill tailings. Kusherbayev warned that the radioactive waste is gradually spreading into the ground waters and has been detected up to 4 km away. He stressed, "The problem has been repeatedly discussed by various agencies but it has not been solved yet. It cannot be put off any longer."

ECO Environment Ministers Meet in Almaty

¶10. On June 28-30, Almaty hosted the third international meeting of ECO environment ministers (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). They assessed their implementation of the previously-adopted Action Plan, discussed newly-developed environment protection measures within the ECO community, and launched several new projects aimed at strengthening international financial support. They also considered the possibility of joint measures in ecological tourism. Meeting participants briefed their colleagues on national developments in environment protection. Kazakhstan described two limitations placed on oil producers - a ban on associated emissions into the atmosphere, and a ban on waste disposal in water reservoirs.

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